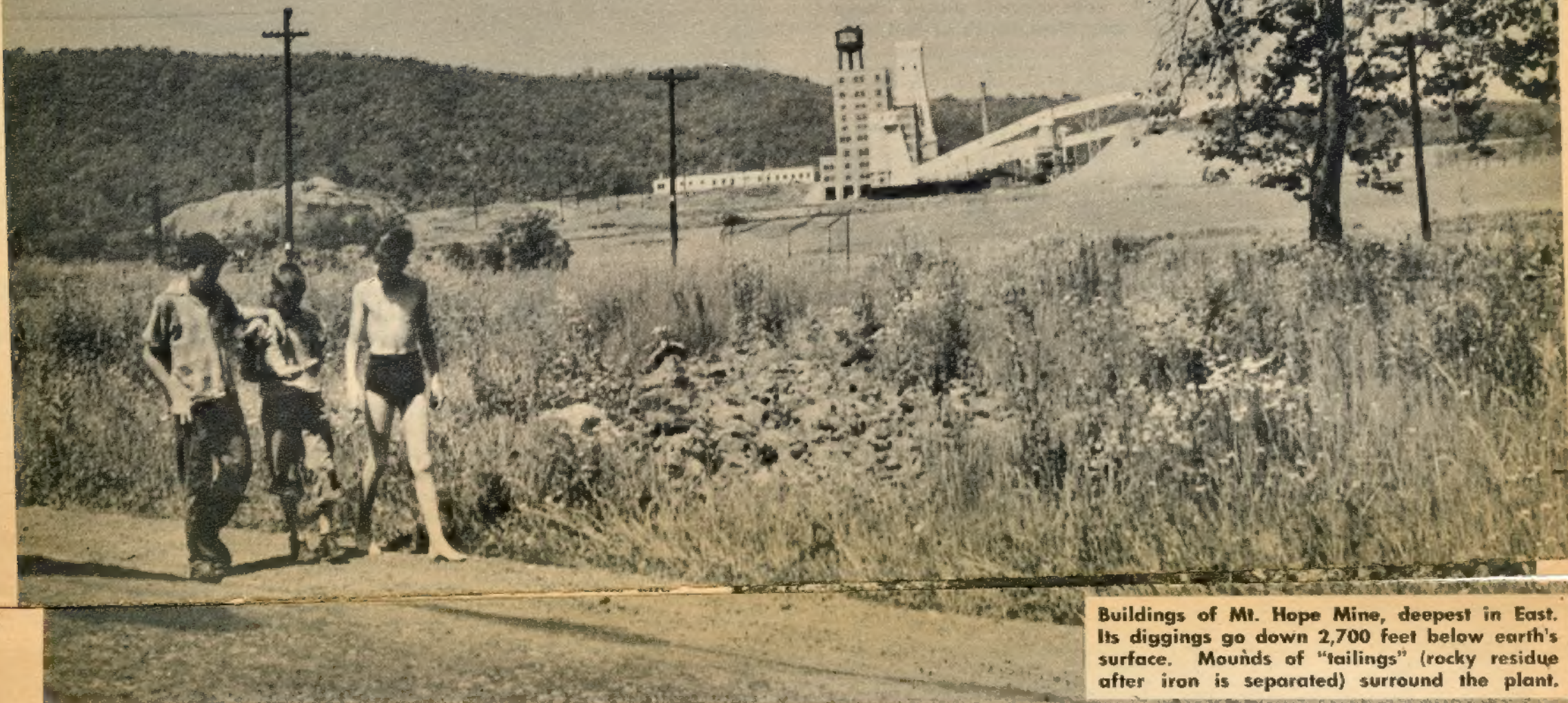


LET'S EXPLORE--

Morris County Mine Region



Buildings of Mt. Hope Mine, deepest in East. Its diggings go down 2,700 feet below earth's surface. Mounds of "tailings" (rocky residue after iron is separated) surround the plant.

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

IRON still is "King" of the mountains surrounding Dover, although the crown has been somewhat tarnished since 1882 when the iron industry found iron ore could almost literally be picked up from the surface in the Mid-West region surrounding Lake Superior. Since that day dozens of New Jersey mines have closed, leaving only three active pits digging iron from rock walls hundreds of feet beneath the earth's crust.

Yet, with millions of tons of ore waiting to be tapped (recent estimates said 600,000,000 tons remain in North Jersey), the "King" always holds promise of better days. Even without that promise iron could rule on the basis of the romantic past when iron meant power in North Jersey. From the days before 1700 when colonists first heard from the Indians about the "black stone," the North Jersey iron belt has been pierced by more than 350 mines, which in turn fed scores of forges.

This north Morris County region is traversed by good roads, although the growth of Picatinny Arsenal has "dead-ended" some routes which once carried straight through. However, the three active mines are readily visible from the streets and some of the remains of abandoned mines and furnaces can be seen. The iron area is surrounded by good mountain scenery—in many regions where iron mines have ceased to operate vacation spots have sprung up. Thus, the trip

can be both pleasantly cool and historically stimulating.

Resist the temptation to venture into the hills looking for closeups of abandoned mines unless your geological training has made you aware of the dangers involved. A slip at the edge of one of these craters can mean a plunge of a quarter of a mile. In many spots the edges around old pits are crumbling into the open holes. These old mines are no place for play.

BOONTON RESERVOIR, which since 1902 has supplied water to Jersey City, starts the iron story. Along Route 6, it's easily reached from Route 10 via the traffic light at U. S. Route 202. Sixty feet below the crest of the reservoir waters is Old Boone Town, site of pre-Revolutionary War forges. Here ore was brought from the mines to the west and worked into tools and utensils, much of the time in "bootleg" fashion because of Parliamentary restrictions.

History tells of one iron slitting mill in Boonton disguised as a grist mill to hide violation of the English rule which said only bar iron could be made in the colonies. Perhaps freedom started in these Morris County hills because three decades before the Boston Tea Party Jersey iron men were defying British impositions. King's agents, probably more cautious than observing, constantly reported no breaking of English law, but by 1776 dozens of Morris County forges

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Resident of the mountain region near Hibernia, once the heart of New Jersey's iron industry, peers into an abandoned shaft. A slip at the edge may bring about a drop of a quarter mile.



Broad falls and rushing water near Powerville make a pretty picture along the Rockaway River, north of Boonton.

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were well enough established to supply the infant United States with much of its iron needs.

Upward from Boonton the route follows the Rockaway River, whose story is closely intertwined with the iron industry. The Rockaway, probably so-called from the Indian name "Roga Weighwero" (running out of a deep gorge), provided most of the power of the mills and still supplies a few industries their driving force. The Indian's "deep gorge" can be viewed to the left from the bridge across the reservoir at Boonton's entrance.

AFTER the Rockaway is crossed on the bridge near Powerville's broad falls, signs point the way to Split Rock. Normally this road is quiet out now during the week trucks rumble through the valley all day long to the new dam Jersey City is building at Split Rock Pond to expand its water facilities. Week-ends, however, the road reverts to its cool, traffic-free state. Part of the way the road is macadam but even when this gives way to gravel and dirt driving is good.

The road near Split Rock is closed, necessitating a left turn back to Meriden and Beach Glen. A yellow house and a stone wall on the corner in the middle of a broad clearing indicate the turn. This road is just wide enough for two cars to pass and two extremely sharp right turns necessitate careful driving. Hills rise sharply along the way, indicating that the heart of the mining country has been reached. The road dips down to an intersection near Decker's saw mill, one of North Jersey's

busiest, where full-sized trees are converted to board widths.

The road passes close by the entrance of the old Beach Glen Mine, which suspended operation in 1929 after a history antedating the Revolution. Records show a forge on the site as early as 1760, but mining records date only from 1808. Beach Glen was opened and closed intermittently, with activity varying from surface mining to extensive digging. During World War II test drills showed reserves of more than 10,000,000 tons still in the abandoned mines.

North of Beach Glen (right at the saw mill) is Hibernia, once the heart of New Jersey's iron industry. Twelve abandoned shafts, dug in succession to ease digging, tell the sad story of an enterprise which was doomed after 13 miners drowned in 1906 in a flooded shaft. Mining continued until about 1913 but always on the decline and Hibernia couldn't even revive in the hastened iron activity of two world wars. Once hundreds of people lived in the mountains and the hills echoed to the roar of machinery. Now only two families live near the mines and cement foundations stretching through the quiet woods can give but a hint of the vastness of the early operations.

THROUGH the years the Hibernia mines have become increasingly inaccessible and a few days ago they were shut off more completely when Rockaway Township officials turned back to the mine owners the direct road to the mountain from Hibernia. For years sides of the road have been falling into the pits. To travel safely the families left in the mountain now must detour eight or ten miles to



Mountain Scenery Ple

reach Hibernia, less than half a mile down the hill.

Hibernia's gaping mine pits have often been on the front pages although they no longer yield ore. In December, 1920, a car stolen in Newark was driven to the edge of a 1,600-foot shaft and pushed into it. Luckily, the heavy machine caught on rocks only 75 feet from the surface and was recovered. Then, in May, 1922, county and local police were summoned by mysterious tales of a bundle "five or six feet long" having been tossed into the pit by two men. The mystery was not solved. A few years ago four boys were dramatically rescued after they had fallen into another shaft.

Close to the Hibernia store chunks of ore surround the remains of the extensive loading platforms on the now-defunct spur of the Jersey Central Railroad. Its roadbed is visible all the way down to Rockaway although the tracks were taken up during the war.

In Rockaway the site of Hoagland's Foundry along the old Morris Canal is marked by two buildings since reconverted but most of the foundry disappeared after the canal was closed. The route through Rockaway is along Church street. On the left, where the playground now is located, the Morris Canal once flowed. On the right is the old First Presbyterian Church, whose history dates back to 1758 and in whose cemetery are pre-Revolutionary gravestones. The present church with four oddly-shaped spears jutting upward from its tower, was built in 1832. Turn right past the church and the road winds through attractive country northward to Mt. Hope.

MT. HOPE boasts the deepest vertical mine shaft in the East, just beyond the triangular road intersection. The shaft, which descends nearly 2,700 feet below the surface, was dug during the war to tap ore veins hitherto thought inaccessible. Now miners are busy digging a half mile from the top. Covering about 275 acres between the road and the mine is a lake formed

from water pumped out of the mine and used in processing the ore. Stumps of decaying trees, flooded when the lake was formed, give the region an Everglades-like appearance.

Mt. Hope is reputed to be one of the oldest iron mines in the United States, dating from 1715, and during the Revolution it was used in making cannonballs. Its early owners were the Ford family, long identified with Morris County history, but by 1773 it was in the hands of John Jacob Faesch on a 42-year lease. Faesch, a Swiss immigrant, was one of the first men to bring science to iron production. Before coming to the Dover area he put the Ringwood mines on a paying basis.

Beyond Mt. Hope the road ends suddenly at Picatinny Arsenal gates. Once it continued south to Wharton but now the only way to Wharton from Mt. Hope is at the intersection just before the mine is reached. Thus, a view of the mine must be considered a "side trip," but a wide corner at the mine entrance makes turning around easy.

Between Mt. Hope and Wharton is Richard Mine, partially hidden behind tall marsh grass sprouting in the water pumped from the mine. This

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Decker's saw mill, one of busiest in North Jersey, is at intersection of roads near old Beach Glen Mine site.



Richard Mine, oldest operating mine in



Ruins of Roplogle Steel Company foundry at Wharton appear like bombed-out area. Concrete structures in rear once carried railroad cars out to slag heap.

ntiful in Iron Area

said to have been continuously mining longer than any other in the United States, was also once owned by Faesch and it took its name from his son Richard. The mine has been running since 1857 while other mines with earlier beginnings have been shut down several times throughout the years.

The route to Wharton is simplified by a traffic circle on Route 6A near the entrance to Picatinny Arsenal. On Main street; just beyond the pond, paralleling the railroad tracks to the left, are the impressive ruins of the once-great Roplogle Steel Foundry, which stopped operations in 1919 and seriously crippled Wharton. The foundry ruins, now lying like a cross between a bombed-out area and a western canyon, are dominated by lofty concrete stanchions where the railroad once ran.

The last actual production of pig iron in Morris County was at this foundry. For years the ruins were dark reminders of better days in Wharton until the war brought some rehabilitation of a vastly different area. Now a rock wool plant and a paper block factory occupy part of the site and both use the huge slag

heaps in their manufacture. The slag also is being used in road building or for cinders on icy roads. Wharton can never hope to have all the slag used, however: About half the borough is built on old slag piles and mine "tailings" or left-overs.

Past the slag heaps, Main street bends left over railroad tracks and just beyond a right turn is made in Central avenue for the route to Kenilworth and Mine Hill. Keep left at the end of Central, along the abandoned railroad trestles of a branch of the Wharton & Northern Railroad which once carried trains high over the still-busy Lackawanna Railroad. By keeping left on this road the spacious grounds of Hercules Powder Co. are reached, marked by a wire fence inside of which is a private road built during the war to circle the plant and make patrolling on motorcycles easy.

Hercules, scene in 1940 of an explosion that took the lives of 52 men, is directly linked with the mines because it was the extensive iron workings which in 1871 brought representatives from the Giant Powder Co. of California to seek a site for a dynamite plant. They found Kenilworth close enough to the mines yet far away

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Bridge over Boonton Reservoir where Rockaway River enters. Fishermen casting from bridge is a familiar sight.



One of 12 shafts sunk in formerly prosperous area is this open slit which runs deep down at abandoned iron pit near Hibernia.



A state, appears above tall marsh grass. Tailing mound is at right.



Hibernia general store located in what was center of busy mining town. Railroad siding was to left of store.



This week's tour starts at Morris Plains for the swing around northern Morris County and its iron region. From Dover, as map shows, Routes 6 and 10 are available for final leg of trip.

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from populous centers. More important, they found a sufficient supply of cold water to be used in controlling the temperature of the glycerine nitration. First devoted exclusively to dynamite manufacture, the plant in 1876 began manufacturing smokeless powder. Then, in World War I, TNT production was added.

BYOND Hercules as the road veers left past a pond, the Scrub Oak Mine of Alan Wood Steel Co. appears atop the hill to the left, surrounded by a huge gray heap of rock separated from the iron after mining. First opened in 1856, Scrub Oak produced only 25,000 tons of ore, then shut down until World War I brought activity from 1917 until 1923. Present operation has been continuous since 1929. Underground passages in the mines extend almost to Wharton.

At Route 6 beyond the pond turn left to the top of the hill at Scrub Oak entrance. Across from the entrance turn right in Canfield avenue, near the end of which is the site of the long-since abandoned Dickerson Mine, first operated in 1714 and once in the hands of the Dickerson family which

produced Mahlon Dickerson, New Jersey Governor from 1815 to 1817. Turn left at the end of Canfield and continue in picturesque rolling farm country through Mt. Fern as far as Millbrook. This road parallels Route 10.

In Millbrook, at the top of a hill, the tiny white Friends Meeting House, built in 1758, recalls the story of the active Quakers and the days when Millbrook surpassed Dover. Quakers once operated forges with ore from the Dickerson Mine and the entire region developed rapidly until the Morris and Essex railroad extended its tracks to Dover in 1848. Then Dover expanded and Millbrook declined until today Dover is the thriving, busy town and Millbrook has returned to rural status.

At the intersection beyond the meeting house the choice lies between a right turn to Route 10, only a block away, or a left turn into Dover by way of Morris street. The latter will carry down the hills over the railroad tracks to East Blackwell street at a traffic light. A right turn in Blackwell goes all the way through town and beyond. At a "T" intersection, the road goes left for a flow-in junction with Route 6 and the way back to Boonton.



Remains of great slag heap near Wharton Center. The mound is steadily being reduced through use of slag in manufacture of rock wool and cinder blocks and through use in road building.